

it are sweetleaf (*Symplocos tinctoria*), bigleaf snowbell (*Styrax grandifolia*), mountain holly (*Ilex montana*), and especially dwarf pawpaw (*Asimina parviflora*), which covers much of the slope farther northward. The herb layer is moderate, though the October site visit was not a good time to obtain a thorough species list. Notable species found include broad beech fern (*Thelypteris hexagonoptera*) and the Watch List few-flower tick-trefoil (*Desmodium pauciflorum*).

The adjacent bottomland to the west is a mature forest, and because it lack features such as a natural levee and backswamps, it is considered a Piedmont/Low Mountain Alluvial Forest rather than a Piedmont/Mountain Bottomland Forest. The canopy, at least 90 feet tall, contains sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) as the dominant, but red maple (*Acer rubrum*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), cherrybark oak (*Quercus pagoda*), willow oak (*Q. phellos*), and tuliptree are also present. The most common subcanopy tree is American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), whereas cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) is abundant in the shrub layer. The Watch List few-flower tick-trefoil is also present in the floodplain.

The small knoll to the northwest contains some boulders up to 6 feet tall and 20 feet across. Most of the forest has been cut-over, though portions of the southern half are in decent condition. Hop-hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*) is fairly common on this knoll.

To the north and east of the large knoll is a very large beaver pond, covering perhaps 50 acres or more; this is one of the larger Piedmont/Mountain Semipermanent Impoundments in the county. At least six great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) nests were visible in the tops of the bare trees on the site visit. There are only a few such heronries in the county. The ponds contain mostly dead trees, and much open water. Stands of broadleaf cattail (*Typha latifolia*) are present on the fringes. Of some significance on the water surface is the occurrence of longspur creeping bladderwort (*Utricularia biflora*), an uncommonly seen carnivorous plant.

The beaver ponds presumably are important wildlife habitats. Large number of woodpeckers, especially the uncommon red-headed woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), were noted feeding on the dead trees. Wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*) were noted, and they undoubtedly nest at the ponds. Large numbers of frogs and other amphibians are also likely to utilize these wetlands.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: The natural area needs little management, though there is concern that the beavers and their ponds may spread throughout the floodplain and eventually flood the alluvial forest. This would not be tragic, as beavers are native species and their ponds provide excellent habitat for a great variety of wildlife. However, 90-100 foot tall forests are infrequently found now in the county, and efforts should be made to protect them (from beavers, from logging, and from other impacts). No additional logging should take place in the natural area. The area is used by hunters, as evidence of hunting (e.g., shells) was noted. The site is privately owned and is not protected.

A reservoir has been proposed to be built in this general vicinity of Middle Creek, which might destroy this site. If a reservoir is proposed for Middle Creek, efforts should be made to steer the location away from this unique area. If a reservoir is located at or near this site, there is the